

MEMORIAL

OF THE

American Board of Commissioners

FOR

FOREIGN MISSIONS.

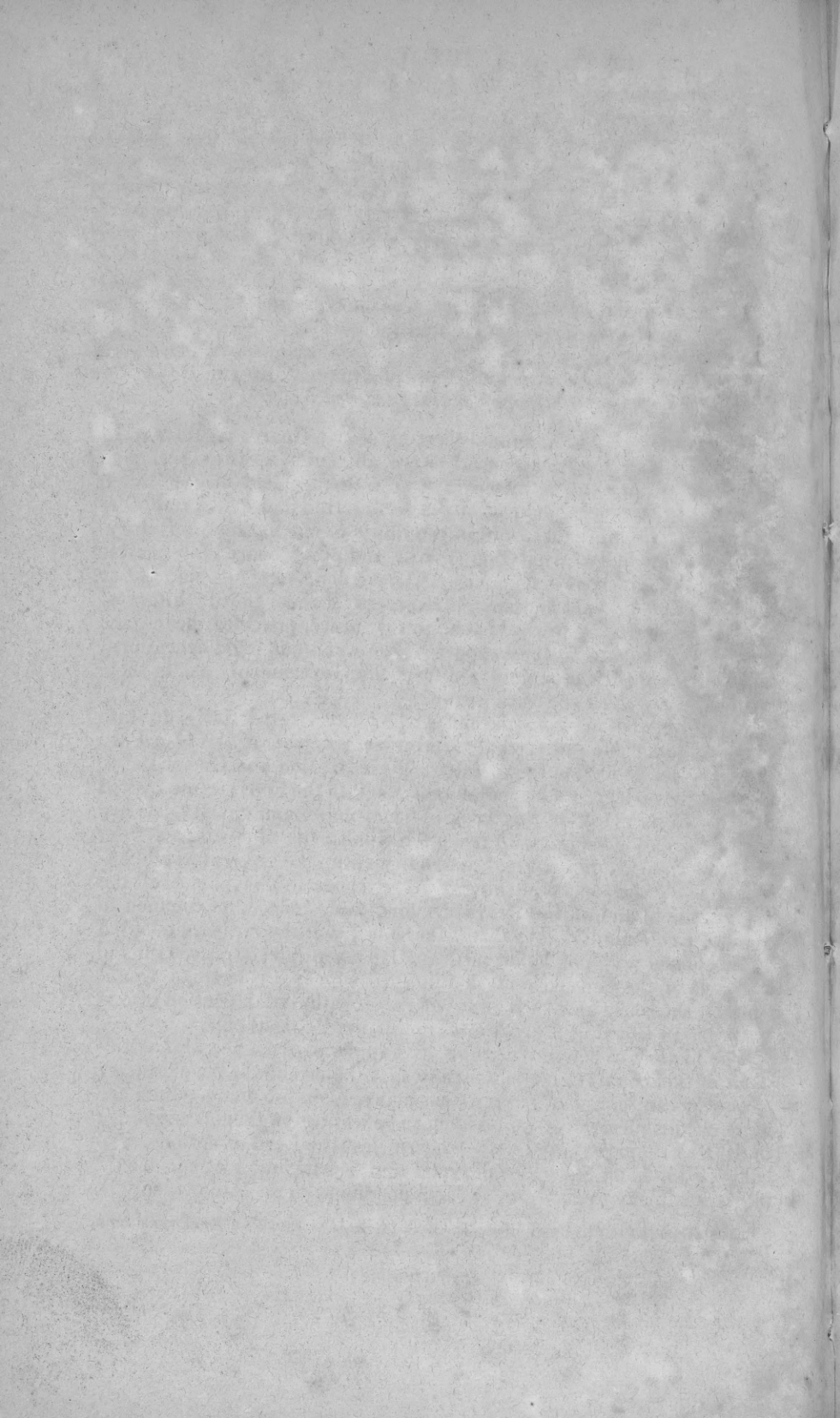
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MEMORIAL.

Memorial of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :

GENTLEMEN: At the annual meeting of this Board, at Boston, in September last, the subscribers* were appointed a committee, "to prepare, and present, a memorial to the Government of the United States, on the general subject of the civilization and moral improvement of the Indian tribes, within the limits of our national territory; stating, summarily, what this Board, and other boards for similar purposes, of different denominations, have done, and are doing, for the benefit of the said Indians; the success of their efforts, hitherto, and the encouraging prospects, as to the future, provided means are furnished adequate to the support of their contemplated operations; and soliciting such pecuniary aid from the Government, as, in their wisdom, they shall see fit to grant."

In fulfilment of our commission, we beg leave, respectfully, to state to your honorable body, that a prominent object of the board we represent is, to extend the blessings of civilization and Christianity, in all their variety, to the Indian tribes within the limits of the United States. In carrying on this work of benevolence and charity, we are happy to acknowledge, with much gratitude, the aid received from the Government, in making and supporting the several establishments made for accomplishing their purpose. The object of the Government, and of the Board, is one, and, indeed, is common to the whole community. We trust, therefore, that the measure adopted by our board will not be deemed an improper interference with the concerns of the Government, a thing at which our feelings would revolt; but, only as a proper act of co-operation of a portion of the citizens, in effecting a great and interesting *national* object.

The history of our intercourse with Indians, from the first settlement of this country, contains many facts honorable to the character of our ancestors, and of our nation—many, also, too many, which are blots on this character; and which, in reflecting on them, cannot fail to fill us with regret, and with concern, lest the Lord of nations, who holds in his hand the scales of equal and everlasting justice, should in his wrath say to us, "As ye have done unto these Indians, so will

* John Cotton Smith, Jonas Platt, Jedidiah Morse, Stephen Van Rensselaar, and Jeremiah Evarts.

I requite you." We here allude to the neglect with which these aboriginal tribes have been treated in regard to their civil, moral, and religious improvement—to the manner in which we have, in many, if not most instances, come into possession of their lands, and of their peltry: also, to the provocations we have given, in so many instances, to those cruel, desolating, and exterminating wars, which have been successively waged against them; and to the corrupting vices, and fatal diseases, which have been introduced among them, by wicked and unprincipled white people. These acts can be viewed in no other light, than as national sins, aggravated by our knowledge, and their ignorance; our strength and skill in war, and their weakness—by our treacherous abuse of their unsuspecting simplicity, and, especially, by the light and privileges of Christianity, which we enjoy, and of which they are destitute. In these things we are, as a nation, verily guilty, and exposed to the judgments of that just Being, to whom it belongs to avenge the wrongs of the oppressed; under whose perfect government the guilty, who remain impenitent, can never escape just punishment. The only way, we humbly conceive, to avert these judgments, which now hang, with threatening aspect, over our country—to secure the forgiveness and favor of Him whom we have offended, and to elevate our national character, and render it exemplary in view of the world—is, happily, that which has been already successfully commenced, and which the Government of our nation, and Christians of nearly all denominations, are pursuing with one consent, and with their combined influence and energies. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions view these facts as highly encouraging; and it is their earnest desire that the God of nations would speed the course so auspiciously commenced, and give direction, and his blessing, to our joint efforts; add numbers and strength to those already engaged in this good work; convince, and reconcile to the object, those who are now opposed to it; and, ultimately, crown our labors with the desired success.

The work in which we are engaged, we are sensible, is not only noble, and god-like, and worthy to command the best energies of our nature, but it is also a great, arduous, and difficult work, requiring patience, forbearance, perseverance, and unremitted and long continued efforts. Here is scope enough to employ the wisdom, the means, and the power of the nation; and the object is of sufficient magnitude and interest, to command the employment of them all.

We are aware of the great and only objection, deserving notice, that is made to our project, and which has been made by some men of distinction and influence in our country, whose opinion on other subjects is entitled to respect; and this is, that "*it is impracticable; that Indians, like some species of birds and beasts, their fellow inhabitants of the forest, are untameable; and that no means, which we can employ, will prepare them to enjoy with us the blessings of civilization.*" In answer to this objection, we appeal to facts; facts not distant from us—not of a doubtful nature; but which exist, and are fast multiplying among us under our own eyes and observation—to facts

which cannot be doubted, and in such number and variety, as furnish indubitable evidence of the practicability of educating Indians in such manner, as to prepare them to enjoy all the blessings, and to fulfil all the duties, of civilized life. A visit to the Cornwall school for educating heathen youth, and to the several establishments among the Cherokees and Choctaws, (to say nothing of many others to which we might refer,) begun by indefatigable and exemplary Moravian missionaries, and pursued by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, would be sufficient to satisfy any candid inquirer on this subject, of the truth of what we have asserted. In these establishments, the experiment, as to the practicability of imparting to Indians an education suited to the enjoyments and duties of civilized life, has been fairly made; and made, too, by the acknowledgment of hundreds of our most respectable citizens, (and among these we are happy to refer to the present respected President of the United States, who has been an eye-witness in the case,) with complete success. More evidence, on this subject, is deemed by your memorialists unnecessary, as the evidence of *facts* is paramount to all *reasonings* which can be urged against them.

It being admitted, then, that the Indians within our jurisdiction *are* capable of receiving an education, which will prepare them to participate with us in all the blessings which we enjoy, these questions will naturally arise: Is it desirable that they should receive such an education? Are they willing to receive it? Have we the means of imparting it to them? These questions, your memorialists conceive, may, with confidence, be answered in the affirmative. It is desirable that our Indians should receive such an education as has been mentioned, we conceive, because the civilized is preferable to the savage state; because the Bible, and the religion therein revealed to us, with its ordinances, are blessings of infinite and everlasting value, and which the Indians do not now enjoy. It is also desirable as an act of common humanity. The progress of the white population, in the territories which were lately the hunting grounds of the Indians, is rapid, and probably will continue and increase. Their game, on which they principally depend for subsistence, is diminishing, and is already gone from those tribes who remain among us. In the natural course of things, therefore, they will be compelled to obtain their support in the manner we do ours. They are, to a considerable extent, sensible of this already. But they cannot thus live, and obtain their support, till they receive the education for which we plead. There is no place on the earth, to which they can migrate, and live in the savage and hunter state. The Indian tribes must, therefore, be *progressively civilized*, or *successively* perish.

The only objection to their civilization, which has been seriously made, is, that it would destroy our now profitable fur trade. But will it not be destroyed if the white population is suffered to spread, unchecked, over the hunting grounds of these Indians? To destroy their game and to leave them to starve and perish? But, these consequences aside, can a *Christian*, who knows the present state of

these tribes, their ignorance, and increasing miseries, and who duly estimates his own superior blessings, make this objection? Will any man, claiming to possess a common share of humanity and benevolence, say, "Though these poor Indians, if we were so disposed, might be made happy, and we have the means of making them so, yet, as the doing of this would deprive a small portion of our citizens of a gainful commerce, it must not be done?" No man, we believe, would utter such language as this, and avow a sentiment so revolting to all the good feelings which belong to our nature.

Are then the Indians *willing* to be civilized? The explicit declarations on this point, of large numbers of their chiefs, and most influential men; and the earnest *entreaties* received from many of them, sufficiently show that they are willing. Our education families are every where gladly and gratefully received, and kindly treated, and from many other places the cry for new establishments is heard. Judging from past experience, we have reason to expect, that, the objections now made by some of the Pagan chiefs, and interior tribes, whose game is yet plenty, will be gradually removed; and, that this cry for instruction will be extended among them, as their civilization advances. Admitting then, that it is desirable that the Indians should be civilized; and, that they are willing and anxious to be educated for this purpose; have we the *means* of satisfying these desires, and of giving them the education necessary to their becoming our fellow citizens, and sharing with us our privileges? We cannot hesitate how to answer this question. We undoubtedly possess, in abundance, all the means necessary to give all the Indians, as fast as they shall desire it, the most complete education they are capable of receiving. A very small part of the profits, on the many millions of acres of most valuable lands, purchased by the government of these Indians, would furnish ample pecuniary means for the support of as many education establishments as would be competent to the purpose; and the religious associations of the different denominations of christians already formed, and forming, stand ready, faithfully to apply these means when put at their disposal, to the accomplishment of this desirable object.

Your memorialists beg leave respectfully to invite the particular attention of your honorable body, to the plans heretofore suggested, of *colonizing* the Indians, and of founding and endowing a college among them, for the higher education of Indian youth of promising character and talents, to act as missionaries among their brethren. The former seems to be peculiarly applicable to the state of our Indians, and the only method, by which those who remain, can be preserved from extinction. This plan consists in collecting, on some well located and inviting territories, in the north and in the south, one for the northern, the other for the southern Indians, the remnants of tribes, now scattered and dwindling away among the white settlements; and, from time to time such others, along our borders, as are willing to be civilized, and planting among them, at favorable points, education families, under the protection of a small, well selected military garrison.

These will form the rudiments of future towns, and cities, and even states, and ultimate entire civilization. "It is, in short," to borrow the language and sentiment of a late sensible, foreign writer, on this subject, "merely to follow the method by which civilization has begun and proceeded in all countries and times; villages rising into towns, and towns into cities," and these, we may add, into large communities, "having been the origin and medium of all improvements."* The *hunter, roving state*, is not adapted to the establishment and support of the institutions which pertain to christianity and civilized life. These require the aids which can be furnished only in the congregated and agricultural state.

The establishment of a college for the education of Indian youth, appears to be an indispensable mean of successfully carrying forward the civilization of their tribes, which must be done, as it ever has been done, in like cases, by *native* missionaries. Indians must be civilized and converted to the faith of the gospel by Indians, who themselves have been first civilized and converted.†

Another topic of great moment, which we beg leave to submit to the consideration of your honorable body is, that of conducting trade with the Indians. They complain, and not without cause, that they are wronged out of their hard earned property in various ways, but most commonly through the intemperate use of intoxicating liquors. This, as is well known, is the bane of Indians; and, together with their association with the worst and lowest white people, those who are familiar with crime, and have fled from justice, are the great and almost insuperable obstacles in the way of benefitting the Indians. It is necessary, therefore, that these obstacles be first removed by laws and regulations wisely framed, and effectual to this purpose. We beg leave here to refer again to the Report we have mentioned, (p. 92) and to the plan there suggested for conducting Indian trade.

From these views of the important subject which we have thought it our duty respectfully to lay before your honorable body, your memorialists can perceive no serious obstacle in the way of completely effecting one of the noblest works, the most honorable to our character both at home and abroad, and the most god-like, in which, as a nation, we can engage. If this be done, a debt we owe to the injured ancestors of the present and future generations of our Indians, will be paid as far as we can now do it; and, the judgments of heaven which impend over us for these injuries, will be averted. We and our children will have satisfaction in reflecting, that we have been honored as the instruments of rescuing from destruction, raising from ignorance and wretchedness, and of imparting comfort and blessings of immense and interminable value to many thousands of our fellow beings, who are now "ready to perish." Your memorialists, therefore, deeply impressed themselves with the magnitude and importance of

* Douglass' "Hints on Missions," Am. edit. p. 77. See also Dr. Morse's Report to the Secretary of War, p. 82 to 91. App. pp. 14 and 15; 50 to 60; 311 to 316.

† See the Report above mentioned, pp. 76 to 78, and App. pp. 264 to 278.

the subject, beg leave, with all dutifulness and earnestness, to request and to entreat your honorable body to take it under your particular consideration, and to act thereon, as in your wisdom you shall think fit. They particularly ask, that some further pecuniary aid may be provided and furnished for the support of the establishments already made by the Board they represent, and for forming new establishments of the like kind, which are loudly called for by other tribes, and in stations of much importance, whence an extensive good influence might be exerted on our northern borders, among many numerous and powerful tribes, dwelling upon them.

Having made the foregoing representations and remarks, your memorialists, with confidence and good hope now leave the business committed to them, to the consideration of your honorable body, who have the power to act efficiently in its accomplishment—praying, that you may be endued with that integrity and uprightness which will preserve you from error in your deliberations, and give you plenteously of the wisdom which is from above, which is profitable to direct, and will, infallibly, lead you to all right results.

STEPHEN VAN RENSSELAER,

In behalf of himself and

J. C. SMITH,

JONAS PLATT, and

JEDEDIAH MORSE.